# New Fiction

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metrical figure or letter or sketch. Such a drawing was found the night of the murder in the house where the crime had taken place. By use of it the Governor and Burgess finally pick the slayer.

"The Wrong Number" is an amusing tale of how Burgess, in his wife's interest, gets revenge upon a social rival who has virtually kidnaped an Italian Countess to her own instead of to Mrs. Burgess's home. The process, on the occasion of the visit of some European officials, is reversed with much more ignominious results in this case. All six of the stories are delightfully entertaining and are representative of the higher orders of the contemporary American short story.

AARON'S ROD. By D. H. Lawrence. Thomas Seltzer.

MR. LAWRENCE is a competent craftsman; sometimes even an artist, though, as in this case, he is capable of being tiresome, prolix, even maundering in his narrative. He has flashes of genuine insight, though his philosophy as an entirety is shoddy; woven of a cloth that won't wear. An inquiring finger easily pokes holes in it, though looked at from a sufficient distance, casually, it has a lustrous appearance. He is also unfortunate in the overloud noises made by his *claque*—from which he must accept some responsibility, since the most absurd portions of the comment are repeated here from an earlier use in pushing his previous books. To be told that he is "the greatest writer living" is merely amusing, but it becomes annoying when we are warned that "for the contemporaries of Lawrence to remain ignorant of his writings is like having lived in the age of Shakespeare and having remained ignorant of his plays." It recalls the familiar Caledonian trumpeting, "Whaur's your Wully Shakespeare the noo?" The objection is justified because Mr. Lawrence is big enough to stop sueh noises if he did not like them.

This particular story—or disquisition, for it can hardly be called a story—is advanced as a final analysis of the "love life of modern men and women." Its central idea is the deep rooted antagonism of the sexes. Like most of Mr. Lawrence's adventures into psychology, the thesis is based upon a partial truth, a fragmentary bit taken out of its setting, out of its place as a part of the whole of life and treated as if it were the whole thing in itself. The theme is pretty well stated in Aaron's meditation after he has abandoned his wife and three children.

"He felt the curious and deadly opposition of his wife's will against his own nature, the almost nauseating ache which it amounted to. . . . Her will, her will, her terrible implacable, cunning will! What was there in the female will so diabolical, he asked himself, that ticould press like a flat sheet of iron against a man all the time? The female will! He realized now that he had a horror of it. It was flat and inflexible as a sheet of iron. But also it was cunning as a snake that could sing treacherous songs. Of two people at a deadlock, he always reminded himself, there is not one only wholly at fault. Both must be at fault. . . . Take Lottie. He had loved her. He had never loved any other woman. If he had had his other affairs—it was out of spite or defiance or curiosity. They meant nothing. He and Lottie had loved one another. And the love had developed almost at once into a kind of combat. . . . First and single he felt, and bore himself as such. It had taken him years to realize that Lottie also felt herself first and single . . . that she, as woman, was the center of creation, the man was but an adjunct."

So he ran away to be a "center" all by himself. He had been a "check weighman" at a colliery, but he also played the flute. He played well enough to get a job in a London orchestra, even at the opera. He develops from a homespun workman into a philosophic philanderer, falls in with a large menagerie of equally eccentric folk and has a series of not very remarkable erotic adventures in London and in Italy, to no very definite end. It is chiefly a device for the elaboration of variations upon the theme just stated—the irreconcilable conflict of the sexes.

Mr. Lawrence tells us that "it is remarkable how many odd or extraordinary people there are in England. We hear continual complaints of the stodgy dullness of the English. It would be quite as just to complain of their freakish, unusual characters. Only *en masse* the metal is all Brittania." It must be admitted that if we are to accept the wandering creatures whom Aaron meets as typical of anything but an escaped band from a lunatic asylum, the English are, indeed, an extraordinary people. It is refreshing to meet the one entirely sane character who appears, for a brief moment, in the story—a policeman who helps the drunken Aaron upstairs to the rooms of a secondary eccentricity who is to act as host for him while he has the flu. The policeman is a solid, normal figure. But he stands alone.

It is not that Mr. Lawrence's people are wholly fantastic; there is a certain reality about them, but in most cases they appear to be suffering from arrested development. They are never able to see anything beyond their own mysterious complexes. It is, of course, an ancient commonplace of knowledge that each soul must stand nakedly alone, isolated, perhaps even insulated, in the cosmos, but it is also alone in a crowd, and that fact cannot be overlooked. Mr. Lawrence's people are always trying to overlook that, are naturally do not succeed. But Mr. Lawrence does not, apparently, mean to present Aaron as a bit of tragic futility. Rather he is a philosopher. The net result is that he becomes simply tiresome.

HENRY WALKER.

THE ASHES OF ACHIEVEMENT. By Frank A. Russell. Brentano's.

A CERTAIN impishness on the part of the fateful deities that preside over literature often brings it about that a "prize" novel is but a mediocre affair. One learns to be coy in accepting a book that is so marked; possibly because of a natural resentment toward the magisterial attitude of the necessarily implicated judges. But in this case, the judges, whoever they were, cannot have gone far astray in giving Mr. Russell's novel a prize as the "best Australian novel of the year," for it is a very good novel indeed. Its audience should be broader than its native land, for there is nothing narrowly provincial about it.

But, on the other hand, it is emphatically, belligerently Australian—or Antipodean. Its most marked quality is its youthful confidence in the supreme virtue of the new civilization, the new incarnation of the Briton in an open country where he has room enough to grow into something bigger than ever. Probably no one can so well understand it, and sympathize, as the American reader of the older generation, who will recognize in it precisely the mental attitude of his father's day. It is exactly what the American of our un-mongrelized era felt and believed, in his truculent assertion of independence toward the old country, of superiority, in his scorn of a title (the worshiping scorn of the democrat who is happily conscious that he comes of an aristocratic line) and, with it all, his deep rooted consciousness of the lasting values of the older civilization.

The contrast is partially embodied in the story in the persons of its two heroes: Philip, the son of an exiled aristocrat, and Peter the sturdy child of the people, born and brought up as a being wholly of the new land. Philip's father is unable to realize that there "are no peasants in Australia," but Philip himself is sent to Eton, and later on knocks about the world a good deal, as actor and dramatist. He becomes cosmopolitan, but is still also Australian, at bottom. There is a further contrast in their natures; Peter is hardy, unimaginative, solid, while Philip is the temperamental artist. The development of each is skill fully shown, throughout a very neatly made plot, which, however, remains conventional but not tiresomely so.

Philip and Peter fall in love with the same girl. Philip gets her, and the adventures of all three lead widely over the map, to New York, to England, and into the war, culminating in Philip's tragic death, and, after a suitable interval, Peter's capture of the widow. The story is much like others in its general outline. But Mr. Russell is always happy in his use of this more or less familiar material. His drama plays itself out vigorously, without any ranting. Its tense moments are real in their emotion, and there are pasages of almost lyric quality.

But its main value is its presentation of a distinctly Australian envisagement of the problems of life, of civilization in general, and its hopeful outlook toward the future. A bit of dialogue from the final scene will illustrate. Peter says to Margaret:

"'Doesn't it strike you that Australia's a nice little hole, taken all around?'

"She breathed deep of the sparkling, tangy air. 'Worth fighting for, Peter?' she asked.

"'Just about,' he said. 'It'll do me, if some of these talky-talky gentlemen of the soapbox and the pulpit will stop poisoning the atmosphere. It's taken a lot of trouble to hold it; I reckon we've got the right to run it now. Anyhow, we're going to.'"

But Margaret and Peter and the rest of them are not narrow. In fact they are more royalist than the king himself. We are told that "she who had wished to be an Australian more than anything else discevered that it is impossible to be a good Australian unless one has learned first to be a good Briton." There is nothing cheap or ranting about that feeling. It will be understood by all, whether Australian, Canadian or citizens of our own nation, whose traditions run back through the many centuries of the growth of an Anglo-Saxon civilization. As a fine artistic expression of that feeling this story is highly noteworthy.

HEPPLESTALL'S. By Harold Brighouse. Robert M. McBride & Co.

MR. BRIGHOUSE has a list of four novels and a dozen plays to his credit, which implies a definite place among British writers. His work should be better known here as well. It has solidity, breadth and depth of vision and especially a sure sanity, an unhurried, serene quality that is a rarity in modern fiction. His style is always smooth, careful and not lacking occasional brilliancy. His dramatic power is very considerable, and he has a complete mastery of its technique. If the movement of his story is a little ponderous it is never clumsy or dull. His work is somewhat lacking in lighter humor, but it remains genial and is without any stiffness.

This is a monumental novel; in fact, it is several novels rolled into one. There is enough raw material to make at least three separate stories of ordinary volume, each fairly complete in itself, with enough left over to serve as beginnings for half a dozen more. The book is practically a trilogy of stories worked together upon a continuing central theme. The junctures are smooth and the whole thing a single harmony, though it is still separable into component parts, like the four sections of Wagner's Ring cycle. Thetotal is impressive. It calls for much sustained power to carry through such an undertaking without any letup in the interest. There is nothing scrappy in the effect of the whole.

It is also out of the common rut in that it is not at all a love story, although, of course, it contains several very well done love stories as integral parts of the plot. It has something of the character of an historical novel, not merely in its wide stretch of time covered but in its excellent portrayal of a bygone age, a picture drawn from an unusual angle. Finally, it touches upon present day, after war problems and the England of to-day.

It is a family history; rather, two family histories with their points of contact, starting considerably over a century ago and touching half a dozen generations of Hepplestalls and Bradshaws down to their happy merger in a sort of Romeo and Juliet finale. It should be remarked that Mr. Brighouse at several points in his plot, or plots, boldly and frankly makes use of very familiar situations, ancient devices of romance and the drama, complications that are even hackneyed and would be cheap in less competent hands; but he always makes them thoroughly alive and lifts them above the commonplace. There is the case of the wronged woman abandoned and maltreated by her seducer, the illegitimate son, who unwittingly becomes the avenger of his mother's wrongs; there is the vulgar young genius, a girl picked out of the gutter to be-

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